

The Intellectual Development of the Cult of Śākyamuni: What is “Modern” About the Proposition that the Buddha Did Not Preach the Mahayana?

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IN THE MID-EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, early modern Japanese thinkers developed the theory that the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni, did not in fact preach the Mahayana or “Greater Vehicle” form of Buddhism. The debate over this point between scholars of the schools of National Learning and the Buddhist clergy continued for roughly a century and a half until the beginning of the twentieth century. In other words, this debate was continued from the middle of the Edo or early modern period (1600–1868) through the first few decades of the Meiji era (1868–1912), and it exemplifies the historical process of intellectual modernization in Japanese Buddhism.

Hitherto, the historical development of this notion has been recounted through the linear schema of so-called modern rationality, beginning with the thinker Tominaga Nakamoto 富永仲基 (1715–1746) of the mid-Edo period, and culminating with the Meiji-era scholars of Buddhism Murakami Senshō 村上专精 (1851–1929) and Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1903). Murakami, a modern thinker, was even stripped of his status as a priest for his advocacy of the theory. However, the figure he praised most highly as “an exponent both of the theory that the Buddha did not preach the Mahayana,

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and also of its opposite,”¹ and upon whom Murakami based his own thinking, was a Vinaya monk from the early modern period named Fujaku 普寂 (1707–1781).² By sublating both Fujaku and Nakamoto, Murakami took the first step toward a uniquely modern development. The Buddhist intellectual transition from the early modern era to the modern era, one aspect of which was the idea that the Buddha did not preach the Mahayana, was possible not only because of the rationality evident in Nakamoto, but also precisely because of the religiosity evident in Fujaku. Together, the two formed the wellspring for the spirit of modernity.³

This being the case, we may ask whence sprang the ideas of Fujaku et al., which formed the framework for the modern Buddhist perspective on Mahayana Buddhism in Japan, and how they developed historically. In research conducted since the advent of modernity, the skepticism of Fujaku and others concerning the Buddha’s preaching the Mahayana has been understood as equivalent to the historicist and rationalist idea of “superseding” or “accretion” (*kajō* 加上), an idea advocated by their contemporary, Tominaga Nakamoto, and has been interpreted as tantamount to the idea that the Buddha did not preach the Mahayana.⁴ To be sure, Fujaku and Nakamoto did share the so-called critical spirit of the mid-early modern period. However, Fujaku’s philosophy was an intellectual form born from his devotion and practice as a Vinaya monk directed toward Śākyamuni. It cannot be understood in the context of the modern standards and framework within which the discussion over whether the Mahayana was or was not preached by the Buddha was later carried out.

It is impossible for us today to fully comprehend the longing for India and for Śākyamuni that the monks who lived under the travel limitations of the Edo period must have felt. Fukuda Gyōkai 福田行誠 (1809–1888), a Vinaya monk who lived from the end of the Edo period and into the Meiji years, was revered as an eminent monk who combined learning with practice, and resisted the campaign to “abolish Buddhism and destroy Śākyamuni” (*haibutsu kishaku* 廃仏毀釈). Mistakenly believing that Nanjō Bun’yū had visited India on the way back from his study abroad in Britain, Gyōkai made obeisance before Nanjō’s feet. Nanjō’s autobiography, the *Kaikyūroku* (Reminiscences), describes the event:

¹ Murakami 1903, p. 146.

² “Vinaya monks,” or *rissō* 律僧, who received the Complete, or so-called Hinayana (“Lesser Vehicle”), Precepts, were a minority within the Japanese Buddhist world.

³ Nishimura 2008, pp. 144–76.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 145–46.

As [Gyōkai] said “Welcome,” he held out his hands to my knees and reverently pushed them atop his head, after which he left immediately. As I was wondering what that meant, His Reverence [Gyōkai] again advanced before me, holding out a piece of *tanzaku* 短冊 paper, and smiling with joy, said “I present you with this.” After receiving it with reverence, I opened it and read:

How venerable, the feet which have tread in the footsteps of the Buddhas!

I would place those feet upon my head.

Gyōkai, eighty-one years of age⁵

Nanjō, who had returned to Japan from his study abroad in Britain, but who had not at this point crossed over to India, “was mistakenly thought” by Gyōkai “to have made a pilgrimage as far as India and the historical sites associated with the Buddha.” Gyōkai was so overjoyed that Nanjō could not bring himself to say that he had, in fact, not yet traveled to India. After that, Gyōkai “said that, in the old days, the Venerable Gedatsu 解脱 [1155–1213] of Mount Kasagi 笠置 had been unable to fulfill his aspiration to travel to India, and had gone out to the seaside at Sakai 堺 in Izumi 和泉 [present-day Osaka Prefecture], dipped his feet in the seawater, and been consoled in his failure by the thought that that water had flowed from India. Recounting this story of how Gedatsu had projected his longing onto the ocean waves, Gyōkai beamed at me with joy.”⁶

Gyōkai, who was by this point utterly unable to hear anything, then presented fifteen written questions about India, which he had prepared in advance, to Nanjō. The next day, Gyōkai went so far as to interrupt his visit for making devotions to the Kannon 観音 at the temple Sensōji 浅草寺 in order to make a call upon Nanjō. These actions suggest something of the joy felt by Gyōkai on meeting someone who had “tread in the footsteps of the Buddha” after reaching eighty-one years of age. Such intensity of feeling for Śākyamuni permeated the atmosphere of the new era, becoming one spark for the enthusiasm that gave birth to modern Buddhism.

The knowledge and interests of Edo-period Buddhist monks informed all fifteen of Gyōkai’s questions. Among them were questions regarding the authenticity of reports of visits to Indian Buddhist sites by the Chinese monks Xuanzang 玄奘 (600–664) and Faxian 法顯 (339?–420?), questions

⁵ Nanjō 1927, p. 251. Concerning Nanjō’s travel to India, see Ogawara 2010, pp. 140–63.

⁶ Nanjō 1927, p. 251.

concerning the use of Sanskrit language and script in India, and questions about the existence of exclusively Mahayana temples in India, which the Japanese monk Saichō 最澄 (767–822) had asserted.⁷ For instance, Gyōkai asked, “Does or does not the dress of Indian monks differ from that which has been transmitted to Japan?” This question likely emerged from an issue that had engaged many Edo-period Buddhists: that of the authenticity of their monastic robes in relation to those thought to have been worn by Śākyamuni.⁸ Gyōkai thus directly inherited the aspirations and practices involved in the Edo-period revival of Śākyamuni’s Buddhism.

When Gyōkai spoke of the Venerable Gedatsu of Mount Kasagi, also known as Jōkei 貞慶, as one who wished to visit India, he had probably meant to speak of the monk Myōe 明恵 (1173–1232), whose dream of seeing the place where Śākyamuni had lived is quite famous. Myōe attempted to cross over to India but was stopped by the Kasuga deity (*Kasuga myōjin* 春日明神). When he stayed on an island in Kishū 紀州 (present-day Wakayama Prefecture), he imagined that another island dimly visible in the western offing was India, and did reverence to it, crying, “Praise to all the relics of the Buddha in the five regions of India.” He found a rock, cherishing it “because it was a rock washed in the same salt” as that of the ocean into which had flowed water from sites associated with the Buddha Śākyamuni in India, and he wrote a poem about it:

<i>yuisseki o</i> 遺石を	How dear to me!
<i>araeru mizu mo</i> 洗へる水も	To think that even the water
<i>iru umi no</i> 入海の	That washed the Buddha’s
	remains
<i>ishi to omoeba</i> 石と思へば	Bathes also
<i>natsukashiki kana</i> なつかしき哉	The stone of this bay. ⁹

For his part, Jōkei was among those who initiated the cult of Śākyamuni in medieval Nara, the Southern Capital, so the confusion, whether committed by Gyōkai or Nanjō, is not wholly without cause.

The dramatic advances made in recent years in the study of modern Buddhism have illuminated the sense of longing for India felt by many monks

⁷ Concerning the fifteen questions, see Nanjō 1927, pp. 255–57.

⁸ Gyōkai may have had in mind the movement to revive monastic robes as developed by Jiun Onkō 慈雲飲光 (1718–1804). Concerning the history of the debates over monastic robes in the early modern period, see Kawaguchi 1976, pp. 340–60. Also see Nishimura 2008, pp. 177–233.

⁹ “Toga-no-o Myōe Shōnin denki” 梅尾明恵上人伝記 in Kubota and Yamaguchi 1981, p. 148. Concerning Myōe’s aborted trip to India, see Morrell 1987, pp. 103–22.

from the start of the modern period.¹⁰ After the anti-Buddhist campaign at the start of the Meiji era, the western discipline of Buddhist studies, with its focus on ancient India and Śākyamuni,¹¹ was brought to Japan by clerical students who had been dispatched to Europe by various denominations.¹² On the other hand, clerics searching for a living Buddhism that had originated with Śākyamuni traveled in a continuous stream to various parts of Asia (India, present-day Sri Lanka, and Tibet) for pilgrimage and study.¹³ These student-monks headed for multiple destinations in Europe and Asia, and while their travels had a variety of consequences, at root, what ultimately motivated them was a sense of mission on behalf of their various denominations coupled with a strong yearning for the Śākyamuni of ancient India.

In the present essay, I will trace the origins and development of Vinaya monks' devotion to Śākyamuni, a devotion which constituted one of the wellsprings for modern views of the Mahayana and Śākyamuni. As described above, Gyōkai, a Vinaya monk who had received the precepts in the Edo period, did obeisance before the feet of Nanjō Bun'yū, the Meiji priest who had studied in the United Kingdom, and regarded the cult of Śākyamuni as it had developed in Nara during the Kamakura period as the roots of his own faith. What made someone with an intellectual stance such as Gyōkai's possible? From the early modern through the modern periods, what aspirations within Buddhism led to the doubts concerning whether the Buddha preached the Mahayana, and to their solution? To begin with, we will examine the faith directed toward Śākyamuni in medieval Nara, where the roots of those aspirations may be found.

¹⁰ Concerning this passion for India felt by monks in modern Japan, Satō (2008) accounts for the fervor broadly felt from the Meiji to the early Shōwa years.

¹¹ Concerning the historical context of modern Buddhist studies, see essays by Shimoda Masahiro, such as Shimoda 2005a, pp. 29–51. Regarding the character of the Buddha as an ideal, see Shimoda 2005b, pp. 365–68. Shima Iwao has sketched out the major tendencies in the development and reception of Buddhism across Asia and in Western Europe from the modern period through the contemporary era, and has argued that the reception of Buddhism in Western Europe took place on the basis of Romanticism and Orientalism. See Shima 1998, p. 17.

¹² Concerning the formation of Buddhist studies in Japan's modern university system, see Hayashi 2002, pp. 33–43.

¹³ On the cult of Śākyamuni among Japanese clerics studying abroad in the Meiji period, see Jaffe 2004, Jaffe 2006, and Ishii 2008.

The Tathāgata Śākyamuni as Merciful Father: The Cult of Śākyamuni in Medieval Nara

Narita Teikan and other previous scholars have done much to advance research concerning the cult of Śākyamuni in medieval Nara, and have made the inner workings of this belief apparent.¹⁴ It was a form of belief and practice which was based on the *Hikekyō* 悲華經 (Sk. *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, hereafter *Compassion Flower Sutra*) and took Śākyamuni as a model. Its adherents aimed for the realization of Buddhahood in this defiled realm. It stood in opposition to the aspiration for birth in a Pure Land through the *nenbutsu* of the Primal Vow as expounded by Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212). Starting with Jōkei and continuing through Myōe, Kakujō 覚盛 (1124–1290), Ryōhen 良遍 (1194–1252), Eizon 叡尊 (1201–1290), and Ninshō 忍性 (1217–1303), this aspiration for enlightenment in this world was a feature of all subsequent members of the Nara-centered group that wished to reform Buddhism through the revival of the monastic precepts.

One of the characteristics of Jōkei's *Kōfukuji sōjō* 興福寺奏状 (Kōfukuji Petition), which he submitted to the court as an appeal for the exclusion of Hōnen's group, is the opposition it poses between the Buddha Śākyamuni and the Buddha Amida. In the third article of the petition, Jōkei accuses Hōnen of the error of slighting Śākyamuni. He asserts that "Although the various Buddhas of the Three Worlds are impartial in their compassion, the favors and blessings bestowed upon us by the teacher of our epoch [Śākyamuni] are uniquely beneficial." He also criticizes the followers of Hōnen, saying: "Who with any sense could be ignorant of the blessings of Śākyamuni? Now the sole-practice people say, 'With our bodies we do not worship other Buddhas and with our voices we do not call upon other names.'" Here the words "other Buddhas" and "other names" indicate Śākyamuni and the other Buddhas. Strongly criticizing Hōnen's party for failing to acknowledge its indebtedness to Śākyamuni, Jōkei continues: "You sole-practice people—whose disciples are you? Who taught you this name of Amida? Who showed you this Pure Land of peace and rest?" He concludes, "You are to be pitied that during your life in these Latter Days you should forget the name of our Original Teacher (*honshi* 本師)."¹⁵ Unlike

¹⁴ There is a considerable amount of research on the cult of Śākyamuni in Nara; here I list only fundamental research that focuses on the *Compassion Flower Sutra*. See Narita 1958, Narita 1965, Narita 1963, and Misaki 1992, pp. 278–87 ("Shinbutsu shūgō shisō to Hikekyō" 神仏習合思想と悲華經) and pp. 288–97 ("Kamakura-ki no Nanto bukkyō ni okeru edo shisō to Kasuga myōjin" 鎌倉期の南都仏教における穢土思想と春日明神).

¹⁵ "Kōfukuji sōjō" in Kamata and Tanaka 1971, pp. 312c–313a (translated in Morrell 1987, p. 77).

Amida, who welcomes worldlings to his Western Land millions of realms distant, Śākyamuni, he contends, is the master of the Buddhist teaching for our world, the Sahā realm of suffering.

Let us examine Myōe in more detail. The *Zuii betsuganmon* 随意別願文 (Vow Inscriptions According to the Separate Vows [For Each Bodhisattva]), written in the ninth year of Kenkyū 建久 (1198) by a twenty-six-year-old Myōe, begins with the words: “My great merciful father, the great blessed teacher, the Tathāgata Śākyamuni.”¹⁶ When Myōe recorded his vows, he also recorded his understanding of himself: “Following the *parinirvāṇa* of my great merciful father, the great blessed teacher, the Tathāgata Śākyamuni, I am the child of the Dharma that remains in this small country, this land on the periphery. . . . I reflect upon myself with great shame, shed tears of longing for my great merciful father Śākyamuni, and cry out from within my shell of ignorance.”¹⁷ Myōe continues by vowing to master the Kegon 華嚴 (Sk. *Avatamsaka*) teachings, but here I would like to examine the *Compassion Flower Sutra*, the basis for Myōe’s vows before the Buddha Śākyamuni in his capacity as merciful father. What was the character of Śākyamuni’s compassion in this text?

The *Compassion Flower Sutra* is a *jātaka* tale of Śākyamuni before he was born as a Buddha, focusing upon the process by which, when he was the grand minister Brahman Hōkai 宝海 (Ocean of Treasure), he received the name of “Bodhisattva of Great Compassion” (Daihi Bosatsu 大悲菩薩). Hōkai, the protagonist of the sutra, recommends to everyone around him that they become Buddhas in future worlds, and he receives a prophecy of his own future Buddhahood from the Buddha of his realm, the Tathāgata Secret Store. After having received decisive proof that everyone around him will all eventually become Buddhas in Pure Lands, Hōkai speaks of his own wish:

All of these sentient beings have already vowed to inhabit pure and wondrous realms and to escape from this impure land. . . . All of these bodhisattvas have given rise to the [mind] of great compassion, but they are unable to choose the bad realms with the Five Impurities (*gojoku akuse* 五濁惡世). The sentient beings of those realms are now sunk in the darkness of ignorance.¹⁸

¹⁶ Concerning Myōe’s devotion to Śākyamuni, see Sueki 1998, pp. 228–54. The English translation presented here follows Unno 2006, p. 129.

¹⁷ The full text of the *Zuii betsuganmon* is transcribed in Tanaka 1982. This text from the start is located on pp. 309–10.

¹⁸ T no. 157, 3: 205a.

The people whom the *Compassion Flower Sutra* describes as being sunk in darkness are none other than we, who reside in the Sahā realm, of which it gives a faithful description. Those sentient beings “are ignorant of their obligations and have lost their sanity; they disparage the good Dharma and have no wisdom,” “do not share what they obtain with others, but disparage each other and have no regard for each other, and are lazy and derelict,” and “by doing evil they receive praise.” Therefore, they are “not accepted into the realms of the Buddhas”; having been excluded from those realms, they have gathered in this Sahā realm. Constantly angry, these sentient beings “fill the Sahā realm,” “eating flesh, drinking blood, ripping off skins to wear as clothing,” and killing one another.

Needless to say, this realm is also filled with suffering. “The Sahā realm has much land . . . which is filled with mud, pebbles, mountain ridges . . . mosquitoes, horseflies, poisonous snakes, and all manner of evil beasts,” and “always has unseasonable hail and rain.” This rainwater is poisonous, and the grains watered by it are “all replete with poisons,” so that the sentient beings who eat them grow enraged, and their faces grow haggard.¹⁹

The world filled with sentient beings in the darkness who have been expelled from the realms of the Buddhas—this utterly desolate world, abandoned by the Buddhas—is the Sahā realm. Hōkai declares: “World-Honored One, I wish at that time to descend from the Tuṣita Heaven, and to be born in the family of the highest Wheel-Turning King. . . . When the human lifespan reaches one hundred twenty years, I will become a Buddha and leave the world. . . . I will become a Buddha, a World-Honored One.”²⁰ Vowing to make this his own world, he is given the name Bodhisattva of Great Compassion. The later form of this Bodhisattva of Great Compassion is none other than the current Buddha Śākyamuni. “Good men, you should now know this: How could the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion of this story be anyone else? It is I [the Buddha Śākyamuni].”²¹

Śākyamuni is the Buddha who voluntarily chose to be born in a world and among people that had been abandoned by all the other Buddhas, to be born into this realm of suffering and among these benighted sentient beings. This is why “although the various Buddhas of the Three Worlds are impartial in their compassion, the favors and blessings bestowed upon us by the teacher of our epoch [Śākyamuni] are uniquely beneficial,” and why

¹⁹ Concerning these sentient beings and the Sahā realm, see T no. 157, 3: 206b–207a.

²⁰ T no. 157, 3: 207a–213a. On these pages are recorded the well-known “five hundred great vows.”

²¹ T no. 157, 3: 224b.

he is revered as “our merciful father, the Tathāgata Śākyamuni.” Above all else, Śākyamuni’s nature lies in his willingness to take on this world, and this unforgiving reality. Even as he retains the appearance of a historical individual who actually lived in ancient India, the Śākyamuni of the *Compassion Flower Sutra* is elevated into a bodhisattva of a great compassion transcending time and space. This is, without a doubt, compassion of a sort different from that of the Buddha Amida, in his Western Pure Land, and it suggests another mode of human life, different also from the path of aspiration for the Pure Land.

The title “Bodhisattva of Great Compassion,” posthumously bestowed on Kakujō, the first person in medieval Nara to administer the precepts to himself in order to become a Vinaya monk, was, then, symbolic. Again, in a vow text that Eizon wrote when he was forty-seven (the first year of Hōji 宝治, 1247), there is an imitation of the vow by Hōkai, to which Ninshō added his name.²²

I hereby vow: Respectfully learning from the ancient vow of the Original Teacher, I would inhabit a land filled with filth; for sentient beings who are constantly expelled from the Buddha lands, I would establish expedient means (Sk. *upāya*; Jp. *hōben* 方便) for their benefit and peace, encountering the various Buddhas, learning the methods for benefiting living beings, residing in lands without Buddhas and bringing about great benefit. [I], the trifling *bhikṣu* Eizon, have also made this vow in the past.²³

In the sixth year of Bun’ei 文永 (1269), at the age of sixty-nine, Eizon revived the temple Hannyaji 般若寺 in Yamato 大和 (present-day Nara Prefecture), and for the dedication of an image of the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī (Jp. Monju 文殊) he made offerings to two thousand outcasts (*hinin* 非人). Those designated as outcasts in the medieval period were mainly groups of sufferers of Hansen’s disease. Eizon made offerings of rice, pots, and thread, as well as white “wrapping cloths” to be used as head wraps for sufferers of the disease. In the vow text written on this occasion, Eizon expounded, “On account of my deep compassion, I would like to make offerings in perpetuity, but in reality their bowls are empty. This offering will not suffice even for a single day’s sustenance.” Eizon, who lived in the Sahā realm, well

²² Concerning the relationship between Eizon’s beliefs and the *Compassion Flower Sutra*, see Matsuo 1996, pp. 90–95. See also Matsuo 2004, p. 39, among other works.

²³ “Geango seiganjō” 夏安居誓願狀 (tenth day, fifth month, first year of Hōji [1247]) in Nara Kokuritsu Bunkazai Kenkyūjo 1977, p. 132.

understood the ultimate futility of making an offering that sustained people for just one day. Further, in his “wish that both the giver and the receiver alike leave aside their greed and taste the bliss of meditation,”²⁴ we may discern the nature of the compassion to which the Vinaya monks of Nara aspired in emulation of Śākyamuni, who chose a defiled realm.

Eizon’s words at the age of eighty-four in the seventh year of Kōan 弘安 (1284), when he conducted a rainmaking ritual, show that he continued to act on the same vow:

Since I took up residence at this temple, my thrice-daily rituals have been done solely for the sake of the peace of this entire land, and the benefit of sentient beings. I have never hoped to be reborn in a Pure Land, nor in the Tuṣita Heaven. I have set my hopes only upon the tranquility of sentient beings, with no thought for my own benefit or fame.²⁵

The cult of Śākyamuni, pioneered by Jōkei, and combined with the cult of the gods of the earth and the cult of relics, spread not only in Nara but also on Mt. Hiei 比叡, and became a mode of faith distinctive to the medieval period. For instance, the Kasuga deity, who was the tutelary deity of the Hossō 法相 school, was revered as Jihi Mangyō Bosatsu 慈悲万行菩薩 (Compassionate Bodhisattva of Universal Practice), an assimilation based on the cult of Śākyamuni from the *Compassion Flower Sutra*.²⁶ The concrete forms taken by this belief varied from person to person, but they had in common an interest in the present world in relation to the realms of the past and the future, and an aspiration for the cultivation and perfection of the individual in the defiled realm, which took as its model the Buddha Śākyamuni. The precepts (the “Complete Precepts,” or *gusokukai* 具足戒), which Eizon and others chose as a method of practice, were believed to have been actually upheld by the Buddha Śākyamuni in ancient India, so to become a Vinaya monk was to retrace the life of Śākyamuni as he really lived, if in ways appropriate to individual ability and resources. This was an expression of a belief in individual ability and effort, and also of the aristocratic thought and culture of Nara.

²⁴ “Hannyaaji Monju bosatsu zō zōryū ganmon” 般若寺文殊菩薩像造立願文 in Nara Kokuritsu Bunkazai Kenkyūjo 1977, p. 157.

²⁵ “Kōshō bosatsu gokyōkai chōmon shū” 興正菩薩御教誡聽聞集 (twenty-fifth day, third month, sixth year of Bun’ei [1269]), in Kamata and Tanaka 1971, p. 197.

²⁶ Concerning the connections between the Kasuga deity and the cult of Śākyamuni in the Hossō sect’s Jōkei and Ryōhen, see Misaki 1992, pp. 283–85, 289–95.

After the Kamakura period, the precept movement in Nara essentially came to an end.²⁷ Jiun Onkō 慈雲飲光 (1718–1804) of the early modern period regarded the Kasuga deity as the keeper of the precept lineage in the era in which there were no Vinaya monks.²⁸ However, in the seventh year of Keichō 慶長 (1602), at the beginning of the early modern period, Myōnin 明忍 (1576–1610) of the Shingon 真言 denomination administered the precepts to himself in imitation of Eizon and the others, and people once more followed the precepts. What was the mode of faith in the Buddha Śākyamuni among the precept monks during the early modern era?

The Five Hundred Years of Śākyamuni's True Dharma: The Revival of Śākyamuni in the Early Modern Era

Hino Tatsuo, a specialist in early modern Japanese literature, once said that the people of the Edo era found their utopias in fantasies of antiquity.²⁹ In the realm of scholarship and the arts, this mentality manifested as a revivalism that sought models in antiquity. Within that mentality, individual intellectuals approached their ideal antique eras through the so-called philological method. The utopia for Confucian scholars was a Chinese antiquity in which the “rites and music of the ancient kings” (*sen'ō no reigaku* 先王の礼楽) were practiced, while the ideal for scholars of Japanese National Learning (*kokugaku* 国学) was a Japanese antiquity in which the “way of the gods” (*kannagara no michi* 神ながらの道) still thrived. In the first part of the Edo period, the Vinaya monks took their respective lineage founders and China as models for their thought and action. In the middle of the Edo period, though, this ideal suddenly mutated, and the new ideal was signified by the phrase “the five hundred years of Śākyamuni's True Dharma,” (*Shakuson shōbō gohyakunen* 釈尊正法五百年), that is, the first half-millennium after Śākyamuni's enlightenment, in which “true Dharma” still existed.

As previously stated, at the start of the Edo period there was a revival of the Nara precepts within the Shingon lineage, which initially spread into the Jōdo 浄土, and then into the Zen 禅 and Nichiren 日蓮 (Hokke 法華) lineages as well. Furthermore, even within the Tendai 天台 denomination, which since Saichō's time had emphasized the Mahayana precepts, there arose the school of the Anraku precepts (*Anraku ritsu* 安楽律), which represented a movement

²⁷ Ueda 1976, pp. 24–25.

²⁸ Sim 2003, pp. 97–99. As a claim for the legitimacy of his Vinaya of the True Dharma, Jiun held that the Vinaya lineage had been maintained by the Kasuga deity when there were no Vinaya monks.

²⁹ Hino 2004, preface, p. 5.

to stress the practice of the Hinayana precepts. This meant that the precept revival movement, restricted to the old Buddhist sects of the medieval period (*Kamakura kyū bukkō* 鎌倉旧仏教), underwent its own distinct development in the early modern era. The Vinaya monks of the first part of the early modern period did have the consciousness that “the precepts are rules for the Buddha-dharma,” but the framework for their thinking was based in their sectarian identities and did not necessarily trace back to Śākyamuni.³⁰ For instance, the Shingon monk Myōnin took as his model Eizon, the Vinaya monk of medieval Shingon. Myōnin sought a formal ordination in China and voyaged as far as Tsushima 津島, but he did not attempt to travel to the India of Śākyamuni. Although various kinds of precept movements began in the early Edo period, at first they were not moves toward Śākyamuni *per se*. In the Pure Land precept movement, the “perfect and sudden precepts” (*entonkai* 円頓戒), original to the Jōdo sect, were sought and even in the case of the Tendai Anraku precepts school, Chinese Tientai of the Song dynasty was taken as the ideal.

Within this milieu, a direct approach to the Śākyamuni of ancient India emerged only in the 1700s, and among members of a distinct minority group. Keishu 敬首 (1683–1748), of the Vinaya school, is considered its pioneer. Born in Kanda 神田, in the land of Musashi 武蔵 (now parts of Tokyo, Saitama, and Kanagawa Prefectures), Keishu became a monk at the age of fifteen at the temple Zōjōji 増上寺. Between the ages of nineteen and twenty-four, he studied the various forms of scholarship in the Tendai and Nara schools in the Kansai region, embracing “profound and unheard-of ideas,”³¹ which his teachers told him to “keep to himself, without expounding upon them to others.” At the age of twenty-four, he received the Complete Precepts, and formally became a Vinaya monk, taking up the abbacy of a Vinaya training temple. Later, he became a recluse, spending his days administering the precepts and lecturing until his death at the age of sixty-six. Because his thinking was so unusual, “those who heard him were either unable to believe their ears, or praised him, or deplored him,” and it is said that he had no disciples able to understand his teachings. Keishu’s thought was reportedly as follows:

He took Śākyamuni as his primary master, and was partial to the two great teachers Nagārjuna and Vasubandhu, but with regard

³⁰ Ueda 1976, pp. 29–38.

³¹ The following biography of Keishu is derived from “Keishu wajō ryakuden” 敬首和上略伝 in Jōdoshū Kaishū Happyaku Nen Kinen Kyōsan Junbikyoku 1972.

to others, even the founders of Tendai, Kegon, Shingon, Hossō, or Sanron 三論, he would correct their errors, adopting what was correct and rejecting what was not.³²

Keishu idealized the monks of ancient India. When he became a Vinaya monk, he changed his name to Keishu, but it is said that “because the rule in India was to take only one name, he used no alternate name (*azana* 字).” We can glimpse Keishu’s thought in private notes of his lectures that were copied by a disciple when Keishu was fifty-five (the second year of Genbun 元文, 1737). Keishu had the following doubts about the notion that Śākyamuni had preached the Mahayana:³³

He said, “[Doubt number one:] It is strange that after the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha, the Hinayana teachings of the *śrāvakas* were assembled into the Buddhist scriptures, even though all of the *śrāvakas* were supposed to have converted to the Mahayana after hearing Śākyamuni preach the *Lotus Sutra*. [Doubt number two:] It is strange that even the Mahayana sutras, which were put together outside the cave in which the Buddhist scriptures were assembled, have at their start ‘Thus have I heard’ (*nyoze gamon* 如是我聞). [Doubt number three:] It is strange that there were no divisions within the Mahayana, even though after the Buddha’s *parinirvāṇa*, Hinayana Buddhism split into twenty *nikāyas*. [Doubt number four:] Who could have transmitted Mahayana Buddhism even though the transmission of Hinayana Buddhism was not cut off? [Doubt number five:] It is strange that Mahayana Buddhism began with the Mahayana teacher Aśvaghōṣa, and was not spoken of before that point.”³⁴

³² Jōdoshū Kaishū Happyaku Nen Kinen Kyōsan Junbikyoku 1972, p. 486a.

³³ Nakamoto published his *Shutsujō kōgo* 出定後語 (Emerging from Meditation) in the second year of Enkyō 延享 (1745), so that at least at the time that Keishu and Fujaku began to have doubts about the proposition that Śākyamuni preached the Mahayana, they could not have known about Nakamoto’s theory of “superseding” or “accrual” (*kajō*). Whichever came first, the important development is that at roughly the same time, both Buddhist and secular intellectuals of the day began to doubt that proposition.

³⁴ Keishu’s “Shinnyo hikkō” 真如秘稿 in Murakami Senshō’s “Keishu risshi no daijō busetsu ron” 敬首律師の大乗仏説論 (Murakami 1903), p. 107. Murakami cited the copy of Keishu’s text held in the library at Tokyo Imperial University, which is thought to have been lost in the Great Kantō Earthquake, and is not currently in the library at the present University of Tokyo. Considering that this was a copy of a secret text by Keishu, it seems likely to have been the only extant copy. Concerning the postscript dated to Genbun 2, see Murakami 1903, p. 112.

He elaborated on these doubts with the following assertions:

As for the Buddha-dharma in India, first the Buddha wished to preach the *Avatamsaka* and the state of self-enlightenment in the reward body, and to make sentient beings aspire to it. However, this was not suitable for the karmic capacity of persons in the Realm of Desire. Therefore he stopped, preached the Hinayana, and established its precepts. Next, he went on to preach the shallow *Perfection of Wisdom (Prajñāpāramitā)* sutras, and then the deep ones; this is the *Lotus*. Next he gave a general explanation, which is the *Nirvana Sutra*. Once this was finished, [he concluded that] because this is a defiled land, the Hinayana is the most suitable for the capacity of its inhabitants. Thus, the sages who have transmitted the Dharma all are Mahayana bodhisattvas inwardly, but outwardly they keep the appearance of shaven heads and dyed robes.³⁵

Even as he follows the classification of the teachings (*kyōsō hanjaku* 教相判釈) that places the Mahayana in a superior position, Keishu is here arguing that the inferior Hinayana is more suitable than the Mahayana for this realm of suffering. Here, as Keishu acknowledges a positive significance for Hinayana Buddhism, particularly its precepts, Mahayana Buddhism fades into the background. He believed that there were three communities at the time that Śākyamuni preached the Dharma: “those to whom he preached only the Mahayana, those to whom the truth was secretly transmitted, and those to whom he preached only the Hinayana.” Keishu thus contrasted the “publically transmitted” Hinayana Buddhism (the Tripiṭaka or Buddhist canon) to the “privately transmitted” Mahayana Buddhism.³⁶

Keishu’s successor was Fujaku, like him a Vinaya monk. Fujaku practiced equally the three disciplines of precepts, meditation, and wisdom, which derive from the True Dharma of Śākyamuni, and did not problematize the founders of the various Japanese lineages. He looked up to Śākyamuni and to the Tang dynasty master Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), who was regarded as the founder of the Nanshan 南山 Vinaya lineage and clearly promoted a return to Śākyamuni. Keishu made his sect’s founder, Hōnen, along with Śākyamuni, an object of his reverence, but no such sentiment toward Hōnen is evident in Fujaku’s works.³⁷

³⁵ Murakami 1903, p. 108.

³⁶ Murakami 1903, pp. 109–10. Concerning Keishu, see Nishimura 2008, p. 58.

³⁷ See Nishimura 2008, pp. 31–32, 82–84.

Like Keishu, Fujaku also observed that Hinayana Buddhism alone had been spread throughout the world for the first five hundred years after the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, and he wondered why Śākyamuni had not preached Mahayana Buddhism. He wrote: "[After five hundred years had passed since the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha], at the time of the great masters Aśvaghōṣa and Nāgārjuna, the Mahayana was actively spread, which is clear from the Mahayana (Sk. *vaipulya*, Jp. *hōdō* 方等) sutras. . . . If the Mahayana were the ultimate teaching, then why did the Buddha not reveal it and disseminate it during the period of the True Dharma, when he was alive?"³⁸ Fujaku's answer was the same as Keishu's: In the latter period of this Sahā realm, it is Hinayana Buddhism that is most suitable.

Because Jambudvīpa is in a period of the increase of the five poisons, it is legitimate for people to enter through the Dharma-gate of non-self. Thus it would seem that from the time of the Buddha's True Dharma in this world for the next five hundred years, he preached only the teachings of the four Āgamas, and the doctrines of the Four Noble Truths, and of non-self. . . . He did not reveal the Mahayana, but seems to have transmitted it as a secret for the sages.³⁹

Fujaku regarded the teaching appropriate for the Sahā realm as the Hinayana, he thought that Mahayana Buddhism had been secretly transmitted to the sages while they were in meditation.⁴⁰ Keishu, Fujaku, and other Vinaya monks sought their basis for the practice of the Hinayana precepts by considering them as Śākyamuni's True Dharma. Meanwhile, their doubts about the notion that the Buddha preached the Mahayana seem to have come about as a question that occurred to them as they were searching for the Buddhadharma of Śākyamuni himself in the literature: Why did Mahayana Buddhism only appear several hundred years after the demise of Śākyamuni? The resolution to their doubts, although still based on traditional theorizing, took the form of a claim that the Mahayana had been secretly transmitted, and led to the basis for their practice of the precepts as the True Dharma of Śākyamuni. That is, their reasoning was that since ordinary people cannot grasp Mahayana Buddhism, they should practice the Hinayana.

³⁸ "Kōkai ittai" 香海一滯 in Fujaku 1911, p. 32.

³⁹ "Shoshū yōgi ryakuben" 諸宗要義略弁 (*Shoshū yōgi shū* 諸宗要義集) in Bussho Kankōkai 2007, p. 473a.

⁴⁰ Concerning Fujaku's argument that the Buddha preached the Mahayana, see Nishimura 2008, pp. 144–76.

As far as I can determine, the Vinaya monks of the early modern period did not refer to the *Compassion Flower Sutra*, nor is there any sign of vows based on scriptures themselves, like Eizon's. As in the medieval period, these monks took as their basis the cult of Śākyamuni, but their methodological approach was characterized by selectiveness—even in the cases of lineage founders, “adopting what was correct and rejecting what was not”⁴¹—and they stood upon the so-called early modern rationality. In their faith in Śākyamuni, there is no longer any of the mysticism or abstraction of the Great Bodhisattva of Compassion; instead, the reason for their belief lies in the very reality and concreteness of the teachings that he preached, particularly the precepts that could be practiced even by an ordinary person. We are here perhaps not all that far from the modern Buddhist cult of Śākyamuni, and modern research into the Buddha Gautama.

Finally, I should like to touch on Jiun Onkō, a Shingon Vinaya monk of the later Edo period. Jiun called for a return to Śākyamuni and widely proclaimed the Vinaya of the True Dharma both to monastics and to the laity, and in his later years undertook research into Shinto. Jiun's “Vinaya of the True Dharma” (*shōbō ritsu* 正法律) was succeeded in the modern period by the Movement for the Ten Good Precepts of Shaku Unshō 釈雲照 (1827–1909). Jiun's movement itself marked the final great push of the precepts movement in the Edo period. Sim Inja has analyzed Jiun's concept of the True Dharma, and has shown that this concept as formulated prior to his research into Shinto, was of a “world in which the Buddha and the Sages were still alive.” After he had started those Shinto studies, though, it became one of “unrestrictedness and spontaneity” (*jinen hōni* 自然法爾).⁴² Let us examine what Jiun meant by his quest for the “Buddha as he had lived in the world.”

He always admonished his disciples: “You stalwart youths have left home to enter the way. You must obtain the Buddha's wisdom, uphold the Buddha's precepts, wear the Buddha's clothing, conduct the Buddha's practices, and ascend to the Buddha's level. By no means should you imitate the actions of the teachers of men in these latter days. You must imbibe the pure ghee and not slurp on the teachings of the Buddha in watered-down form. This was the lifelong practice of the Venerable One, which is why I

⁴¹ Jōdoshū Kaishū Happyaku Nen Kinen Kyōsan Junbikyoku 1972, p. 486a.

⁴² Sim 2003, pp. 31–35, 192.

again use these words when I preach the Buddha-dharma to persons.”⁴³

Jiun, who conceived of the ambition to voyage to India at the age of eighteen, made plans for the revival of the religious group of the era of the Buddha, and he attempted to carry those plans out to the letter. Based on the opening phrase of the collections of sutras—“Thus have I heard”—Jiun held that the sutras were “displays of transmission by the disciples” and had been heard and recorded by them. In contrast to the words of the sutras, Jiun argued, the precepts were “none other than direct pronouncements from the Buddha’s golden tongue.” He also noted that the beginning of each Vinaya text “directly indicates where the Buddha was,” so he regarded those texts as superior to the sutras in terms of their authenticity as words of the Buddha.⁴⁴

For Jiun, the precepts were the absolute truth that surpassed the sutras; they were words that directly indicated the religious community of Śākyamuni as he actually existed in ancient India, and they were a realistic way to revive that community. Jiun pursued the ancient Indian teachings of Śākyamuni and the life of his community through studies of Sanskrit relying upon documentary evidence, and he composed the *Bongaku shinryō* 梵学津梁 (Guide to Sanskrit Studies) in one thousand volumes. One of the results of this research was Jiun’s recreation of monastic robes from Śākyamuni’s time which he pronounced to be the clothing of a Buddha. He produced and distributed one thousand sets. Within Jiun’s religious community, members were assigned meditation as their Buddhist practice.

However, unlike Keishu and Fujaku in previous generations, Jiun did not doubt that the Mahayana was preached by the Buddha. The observation that “when the Buddha was in the world, he frequently preached the Dharma of the Hinayana,” but that in Japan, “everyone reveres the Mahayana,”⁴⁵ did not lead him to cast doubt on the Mahayana. Jiun certainly did recognize the historical development of Mahayana Buddhism after the *parinirvāṇa* of Śākyamuni, but the absolute nature of Śākyamuni’s True Dharma and Jiun’s reverence for the Mahayana were fused in his heart, and he seems to have felt no theoretical contradiction between them. In this sense, Jiun’s understanding of Buddhism did not move beyond the traditional classification

⁴³ JSZ, *shukan* 首卷 (head volume), p. 45.

⁴⁴ JSZ, vol. 14, p. 364–65. A similar passage appears in Jiun’s “Nankai kiki den kairan shō” 南海寄歸伝解纜抄 in JSZ, vol. 4, pp. 41–42.

⁴⁵ “Jiun sonja hōgo shū” 慈雲尊者法語集 in JSZ, vol. 14, p. 376.

of the teachings, and he consistently maintained a strong position that “we should not look for what is superior and what is inferior within the holy [i.e., Buddhist] teachings.”⁴⁶ Likewise, with regard to the precepts, he held that “bodhisattvas also engage in the *śramaṇa* practices,”⁴⁷ so he argued that both the Mahayana and the Hinayana precepts ought to be practiced.

Jiun’s Vinaya of the True Dharma was passed on to Shaku Unshō, and Fujaku’s belief that the Mahayana actually was preached by the Buddha was passed on to Murakami Senshō, if in new forms and with new qualities. The longing for Śākyamuni felt by Edo-era Vinaya monks permeated the Buddhist atmosphere of the modern period.

Conclusion: Toward the Buddha Gautama

Murakami Senshō, who around the turn of the twentieth century put an end to the academic debate over whether the Buddha had preached the Mahayana, praised Tominaga Nakamoto, but at the same time, he also adopted Fujaku’s arguments unchanged, regarding the Mahayana as a truth in a dimension distinct from historical reality. Murakami concluded that Mahayana Buddhism was, historically speaking, not preached by the Buddha, but as a truth transcendent of history, it had been indeed spoken by him.⁴⁸ By cutting off belief from history, and postulating Mahayana Buddhism as an absolute transcending history, Murakami succeeded in circumventing the contradiction between history and belief that had become a problem at that time. We could say that Murakami distinguished between belief in Buddhism and scholarship, making possible objective and historicist research into Buddhist history, and that from within, he opened up the path toward modern Buddhist studies.

After this point, modern Buddhist studies in Japan ran along two lines: the philological research imported from Europe, and traditional modes of study into the Chinese Buddhist classics. As Shimoda Masahiro has shown, the pivot around which these both focused was research into Gautama Buddha, who lived in ancient India.⁴⁹ Śākyamuni, as both the founder of Buddhism

⁴⁶ JSZ, vol. 14, p. 365.

⁴⁷ “Nankai kiki den kairan shō” in JSZ, vol 4, p. 192.

⁴⁸ Murakami 1903, especially pp. 4–5, 245.

⁴⁹ Shimoda Masahiro has pointed out that in contemporary Japanese Buddhist studies, “the pure Buddhism preached by the Buddha is regarded as something to be reconstructed intellectually from the documents of ancient India,” and that “the significance of Buddhism is reduced to the single being, the ‘historical Buddha,’ who is its origin and its beginning” (Shimoda 2005a, p. 45).

and a real historical individual, maintained his absolute position as a being who could fulfill both the spiritual and the scholarly demands of modern intellectuals. The words of Nakamura Hajime 中村元 (1916–1999), a luminary in contemporary Buddhist studies who in 1964 published *Gōtama Budda* ゴータマ・ブッダ (The Buddha Gautama), vividly attest to this fact:

While the historical human being Gautama Buddha was indeed a man who was born, lived, and then died, it is in his transcendence of “the human” that we feel his greatness and our gratitude to him.⁵⁰

Whenever they referred to Śākyamuni, postwar Buddhological luminaries like Hirakawa Akira 平川彰 (1915–2002) and Nakamura would use the title of respect *Shakuson* 釈尊, “The Venerable Śākyamuni.” This title may be considered a symbolic expression of modern thinkers’ intellectual and spiritual modes of being.⁵¹

The sculptural mould that we know as “Śākyamuni” has been cast and recast in many layers in response to the demands of the people of different eras. The Buddha Gautama who lived in ancient India, and whom we see today, was previously the master of the utopian era of Śākyamuni’s True Dharma, which preceded the era of the Final Dharma by more than ten thousand years. Beneath his visage, we can faintly make out the face of the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion, the merciful father who of his own accord chose the realm of suffering, and us, its benighted inhabitants.

(Translated by Micah L. Auerback)

ABBREVIATIONS

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| JSZ | <i>Jiun sonja zenshū</i> 慈雲尊者全集. 19 vols. Hase Hōshū 長谷寶秀, ed. Shirakimura, Osaka: Kōkiji, 1922–26. |
| T | <i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> 大正新脩大藏經. 85 vols. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭, eds. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–32. |

⁵⁰ Nakamura 1986, p. 137.

⁵¹ For instance, Hirakawa 1977, which is used as a textbook for surveys of Buddhist history, begins its preface with the words, “Buddhism began because the Venerable Śākyamuni (*Shakuson*) attained awakening under the Bodhi tree, and transmitted that awakening to others” (p. 3).

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